



ROBERT ALTMAN: AMERICAN OUTSIDER

Vincent and Theo

Robert Altman on 'Vincent and Theo'

When I took on *Vincent and Theo*, I was very clear about what kind of picture I was not going to make. I've never seen one of those biographical films that I liked, and I wanted as far as possible to work against that. While we were looking for an actor to play Vincent, someone asked me what would I do if the ideal actor turned out to be left-handed. I said that would be perfect; then when all the critics protested that Van Gogh wasn't a left-handed painter, I could say that isn't Van Gogh, it's an actor, a reflection. For all that, I think Tim Roth is very convincing; he has been to art school and he's a good drawer. I have a number of artist friends who were very impressed by what he did.

I also didn't want to compete with Van Gogh's art, and I didn't want to try to paraphrase it in the design. There is a kind of painterly progression in the film, to do more with the influences and background of Vincent's life. For instance, the early scenes in Holland were modelled after Vermeer, or the tradition of Dutch painting. The only painting of Van Gogh himself that I had in mind was not one of his self-portraits but the painting by Francis Bacon, of Vincent when he arrives in Arles, with the walking stick and the hat tied to his head. The panorama, which they visit in the Hague, I used simply because it was so surreal. When you actually see it, you can tell how the illusion is created, with a beach that has been built out in front of the painting. But when you photograph it, it loses that three-dimensional quality; reality and illusion merge, and there's no way to tell what this is.

My feeling was that Theo was the madder of the two. He was desperately trying to stay in control and conform, although the rebelliousness kept breaking through. In another way, I saw them as two different types of non-conformist: Vincent was the beatnik and Theo was the proto-hippy. By the time we get to the Dr Gachet sequence, Vincent I think is feeling that everyone is mad. The film at that stage takes a big turn for me, it becomes very stylised. Vincent was becoming more reflective; for the first time he was looking at the world and deciding that it wasn't any place he wanted to stay. He was perceiving that the art world was changing and that he wasn't going to be part of it.

Dr Gachet represented that world: he owned all these paintings, but we wanted to make a point with that line about how they were all kept in the vault. I consider Gachet to be kind of the heavy of the piece. Which makes it ironic that the painting of him has recently sold for over 80 million dollars. That hadn't happened at the time we were making the film, but the Gachet portrait is shown there. When I saw the film again recently with some friends,

that scene took on a whole new power for them simply because of the sale. And it was this silly doctor who in my opinion put the gun in Vincent's hand. It's he who makes the remark, 'The world is a bad painting. God should have destroyed it.'

Vincent and Theo was conceived as a television series, but I only undertook the project on the understanding that I could also make my own film within that. The television version is four hours long, but in terms of what we shot it could easily have been five. The main difference between the two is that the television version is much more linear, there is more logic and a greater sense of chronology to it. There is more of Vincent's time in Holland and Paris, for instance. With the film version, I thought it could be done as a piece of music, structured more according to the emotional flow, the highs and lows. With such a long film, I also thought that would make it easier to get the audience through the first 20 minutes, which is bound to be awkward in terms of exposition.

Before *Vincent and Theo*, I had been intending to make a film about Rossini, scripted by the British television writer Andrew Davies. This fell through because of problems with the production company in Italy; the producer has brought charges against me, saying I defrauded him. But if it hadn't been for the experience of the Rossini film, I probably wouldn't have done the Vincent film. It was intended to be a fragmented, rather Fellini-esque comedy, with an old Rossini played by Vittorio Gassman and a young Rossini played by Richard Grant. By comparison, the script for *Vincent and Theo* was quite conventional, and I thought it would have been interesting to do both of these. Neither of them intrudes on the other at all, and yet historically they both take place at nearly the same time.

Basically, my point of view with *Vincent and Theo* was that I was trying to do the story not of a famous person but of a failed person. Which might be the connection with the film I'm working on now, a contemporary, big-canvas kind of film called *L.A. Short Cuts*. It's based on 14 short stories by Raymond Carver and it all takes place in the blue-collar area of Los Angeles. Each of the stories is self-contained but they sort of interweave; they're not 'plot' stories, they're about small things, little incidents, the lives again of failed people.

Robert Altman, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, July 1990

VINCENT AND THEO

Director: Robert Altman
©/Production Companies: Belbo Films, Central Films, La Sept, Telepool, Raiuno, VARA, Valor
In association with: Aréna Films (Paris)
With the participation of: CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie
Central Films Executive Producer: Ted Childs
Producers: Ludi Boeken, David Conroy
Central Films Producer: Emma Hayter
Associate Producers: Harry Prins, Jacques Fansten
Production Manager: Éric Dussart
Production Manager (Holland Associate): Patricia McMahon
Production Accountant: Bernadette Zinck
Location Manager (France): Patricia Zimmerman
Location Manager (Holland): Mardou Jacobs
1st Assistant Director: Christian Faure
Script Supervisor: Barbara Constantine
Casting (France): Nathalie Chéron, François Combadière
Casting (Holland): Hans Kemna
Screenplay: Julian Mitchell
Director of Photography: Jean Lépine
1st Assistant Camera: Sylvie Carcedo-Dreujoux
Key Grip: Hugo van Baren
Stills (France): Christophe Rouffio
Stills (Holland): Leendert Jansen
Special Effects: Olivier de Laveleye
Editors: Françoise Coispeau, Geraldine Peroni
Production Designer: Stephen Altman
Reproductions: Christopher Stora, Olivier David, Sophie Sennelier, Alain Bizeau, Patrick Bordier, Frederik Monpoint
Sketch/Reproduction Artist: Robin Thiodet
Prop Masters (France): Jean-Louis Laher, Jerry Fleming
Prop Master (Holland): Constance de Vos
Costumes: Scott Bushnell
Costumer: Kristine Fiones
Wardrobe: Jacqueline Steijlen, Ton Hermans
Make-up and Hair: Jeff Simons
Titles: Euro-Titres
Title Painting: Yuri Kuper
Timer: Raymond Geiger
Music: Gabriel Yared
Musician (Accordion): Richard Galliano
Musician (Violin Solo): Pierre Blanchard
Sound Engineer: Alain Curvelier
Assistant Sound Engineer: Jean-Luc Verge
Boom Mar: Philippe Combes
Re-recording Mixer: Jean-François Auger
Sound Editors: Michèle Darmon, Claire Pinheiro
Dialogue Editor: Michèle Hollander

Cast

Tim Roth (*Vincent Van Gogh*)
Paul Rhys (*Theo Van Gogh*)
Johanna ter Steege (*Jo Bonger*)
Wladimir Yordanoff (*Paul Gauguin*)
Jip Wijngaarden (*Sien Hoornik*)
Anne Canovas (*Marie*)
Hans Kesting (*Andries Bonger*)
Adrian Brine (*Uncle Cent*)
Jean-François Perrier (*Léon Boussod*)
Vincent Vallier (*René Valadon*)
Peter Tuinman (*Anton Mauve*)
Marie-Louise Stheins (*Jet Mauve*)
Oda Spelbos (*Ida Mauve*)
Jean-Denis Monory (*Emile Bernard*)
Jean-Pierre Castaldi (*'Père' Tanguy*)
Annie Chaplin (*1st painter*)
Humbert Camerlo (*2nd painter*)
Louise Boisvert (*Madame Ginoux*)
Sarah Bentham (*Marie Hoornik*)
Vincent Souliac (*Paul Millet*)
Klaus Stoeber (*zouave*)
Florence Muller (*Rachel*)
Viviane Fauny Camerlo (*Madame Viviane*)
Alain Vergne (*Dr Rey*)
Féodor Atkine (*Dr Peyron*)
Jean-Pierre Gos (*Trabuc*)
Jean-Pierre Cassel (*Dr Paul Gachet*)
Bernadette Giraud (*Marguerite Gachet*)
Mogan Mehlem (*Monsieur Ravoux*)
Thérèse Cremieux (*Madame Ravoux*)
Kitty Courbois (*Anna van Gogh*)
Jacques Commandeur (*Dorus van Gogh*)
Nora Kretz (*Aunt Cornelia*)
Maxim Hamel (*Parson Stricker*)
Viviane de Muynk (*Mrs Stricker*)
Wim Lindner (*Uncle Cor*)
Margreet Blanken (*Aunt Johanna*)
Gusta Gerritsen (*Kee Vos*)
Han Kerckhoffs (*Vos*)
Kees Coolen (*Uncle Jan*)
Gerard Jan Rijnders (*priest*)
Elisabeth Macocco (*Madame Tanguy*)
Hans Kemna (*Monsieur Du Plantier*)

France/UK/Netherlands/Italy 1990
140 mins

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Nashville Continues from Jun
Vincent and Theo Sat 3 Jul 11:20; Tue 13 Jul 20:30
Prêt-à-porter Sat 3 Jul 18:05; Mon 19 Jul 17:40
The Player Sat 3 Jul 20:40; Mon 12 Jul 17:45; Wed 28 Jul 20:30
Short Cuts Sun 4 Jul 11:30; Sat 17 Jul 19:30
Kansas City Sun 4 Jul 15:20; Thu 15 Jul 17:40
Cookie's Fortune Tue 6 Jul 14:50; Wed 7 Jul 20:40; Tue 27 Jul 17:40
McCabe & Mrs. Miller Tue 6 Jul 18:10
3 Women Thu 8 Jul 20:30
The Gingerbread Man Fri 9 Jul 20:40; Sat 17 Jul 17:50
Dr T & The Women Sat 10 Jul 15:00; Mon 26 Jul 20:30
Gosford Park Sun 11 Jul 15:20; Sun 18 Jul 18:20; Fri 23 Jul 14:30
The Company Tue 13 Jul 17:50; Sat 31 Jul 11:50
A Prairie Home Companion Sun 25 Jul 12:00; Sat 31 Jul 17:50

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